IN 6 MONTHS ... TIME RUNS OUT!

NEW AVENGERS®

HICKMAN
WALKER
MARTIN

026

MARVEL

PREVIOUSLY IN NEW AVENGERS

BLACK SWAN. I'M TOLD YOU JUMPED HERE FROM ANOTHER WORLD, THAT YOU HAD SOME KIND OF DEVICE, AND THEN YOU DESTROYED THE PLANET THAT YOU CAME FROM.

THE INCURSIONS BREAK HOPE-- CRUSH WHAT MAKES US DECENT AND STEAL WHAT LITTLE HONOR REMAINS.

I PITY THE THINGS YOU CLING TO--THINKING THIS PROBLEM IS ONE THAT CANNOT BE SOLVED.

I PITY YOU. THINKING YOU HAVE SOME SAY IN HOW ALL THIS ENDS.

EIGHT MONTHS LATER

"THE *CABAL* IS... UNMANAGEABLE."

IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS WE HAVE DESTROYED EARTH AFTER EARTH, SAVED *SCORES* OF UNIVERSES.

BUT THEY HAVE LEARNED TO RELISH ATROCITY.

AND SO, NAMOR, YOU COME TO ME FOR HELP...

I THINK NOT.

DOOM IS NO MAN'S SECOND CHOICE.

THE MAD THINKER HAS FOUND A WAY TO FIND OUT WHO IS BEHIND THIS. NOW I HAVE A PLAN, AND ALL THE PIECES TO BRING IT TO PASS...

...THANKS TO THE *MOLECULE MAN!*

LET THERE BE SUFFERING AND WOE TO ALL WHO STAND IN MY WAY.

WE FINALLY GOT OUR HANDS ON STARK'S DATA. AT FIRST GLANCE, THE WEAPONS FILES APPEAR TO BE...ROBUST.

WE MAY HAVE LOST TONY--

HE'S NOT LOST. WE JUST HAVEN'T FOUND HIM YET.

THE ILLUMINATI

IRON MAN

THE CABAL

BLACK SWAN

PROXIMA MIDNIGHT

CORVUS GLAIVE

TERRAX

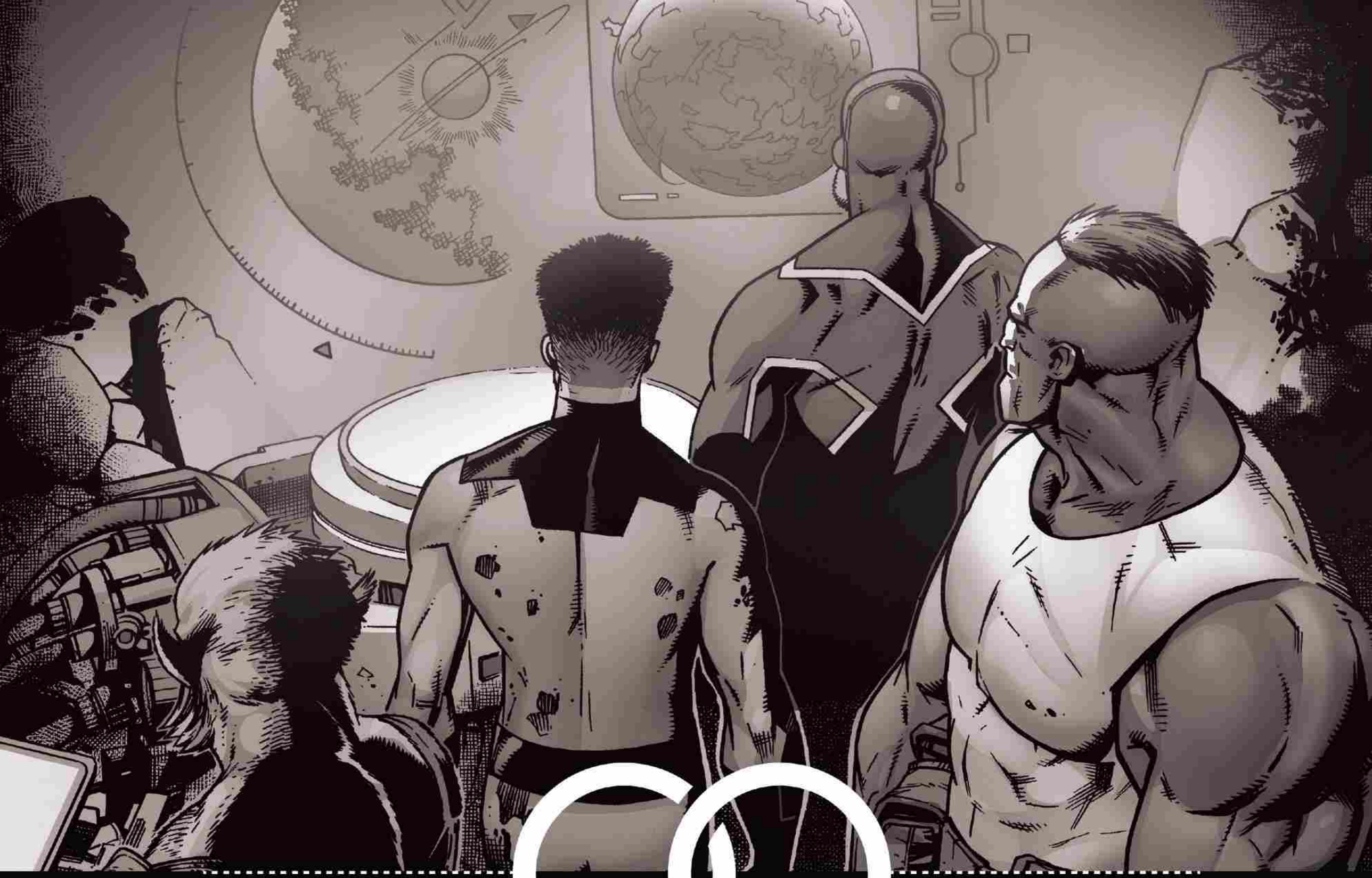
VALERIA RICHARDS

DOCTOR DOOM

BENTLEY-23

THE MAD THINKER

MOLECULE MAN



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NECROPOLIS.
WAKANDA.

PATIENCE.

PATIENCE IS WHAT IT TAKES IF ONE IS TO ENDURE THE INDIGNITY OF CAPTIVITY.

THE PROBLEM, OF COURSE, WITH PATIENCE IS THAT IT DEMANDS SUBSERVIENCE.

YOU HAVE TO HUMBLE YOURSELF. OVERCOME ONE'S NATURAL INSTINCT TO FIGHT OR FLEE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK?

THAT'S ONLY POSSIBLE FOR SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES IN SOMETHING--OR, SPECIFICALLY, SOME***ONE***--TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THEY REDUCE THEIR EXISTENCE TO A SECONDARY POSITION.

MY LIFE MEANS NOTHING COMPARED TO RABUM ALAL. I CAN ENDURE ANYTHING FOR HIM.

WHICH IS WHY I DID NOT BREAK...AND YOU WILL.

WHO HAVE YOU EVER SERVED, ANTHONY, BEYOND YOURSELF?

LATVERIA.

BE-DOOP

HELLO?

HELLO, VALERIA.

UGH! FINALLY.

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG? I'VE BEEN SITTING HERE WAITING FOR SOM--

IS THAT DOOM?

TELL HIM I HAVE SOME BIG IDEAS WORTH EXPLORING. TRULY DEVIOUS STUFF.

I'M LOOKING FOR AGGRESSIVE PARTNERS...I HAVE FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE!

PRIVATE CONVERSATION, BENTLEY. UNDERSTAND?

PRIVATE!

I HAVE PLANS, VAL!

PLANS!

GLORIOUS PLANS!

HE'S GONE NOW, UNCLE DOOM.

SORRY. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT FRIENDS.

YES, VALERIA, EVERYONE NEEDS A FEW. FOR AT TIMES THEY CAN BE...

USEFUL.

DO YOU KNOW WHY I'VE CALLED?

UH, I HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA.

WORLDS COLLIDING. EVERYTHING ENDING...

IS THAT WHERE YOU WANNA START?

HAVE YOU SPOKEN WITH YOUR FATHER ABOUT THIS?

NO. I THINK MOM'S PLAYING THINGS SAFE.

BUT BEFORE HE DISAPPEARED, HE GOT ME A COPY OF ALL HIS DATA. I'VE STUDIED IT, AND COME TO SOME CONCLUSIONS...

I'M GUESSING BY NOW HE KNOWS WHAT THEY ARE.

HOW ABOUT YOU, UNCLE DOOM... YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT I THINK?

YES.

THEN I'LL TELL YOU THE SAME THING I TOLD HIM:

YOU CAN'T WIN.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO IS START FIGURING OUT HOW **NOT** TO LOSE.

"HOW NOT TO LOSE..."

WHAT DOES SHE MEAN?

TRULY OMINOUS THINGS, THINKER...

BUT THAT'S NOT OUR CURRENT CONCERN.

IN FACT, IT MATTERS LITTLE WHAT SHE, OR HER FATHER, OR ANY OF THOSE OTHER SO-CALLED GREAT MINDS BELIEVE...

THEIR CURRENT CONCLUSIONS ARE IRRELEVANT--AS THEIR GOALS ARE NOT NECESSARILY OUR OWN.

OPEN THE CHAMBER.

DID YOU SEE IT, VICTOR? HOW THEY COLLAPSED...

DID YOU SEE THE *SHAPE* OF IT?

HAVE YOU SLEPT, MISTER REECE?

LIKE AN OBJECT AT REST.

FREE FROM EXTERNAL CONSTRAINT.

AND DID YOU *DREAM?*

YES. ALWAYS THE SAME DREAM.

ALWAYS THE SAME.

TIME AND TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

I'M REPEATING MYSELF NOW BECAUSE THERE'S LESS OF ME.

TELL ME.

I DREAMT OF SYMMETRY.

OF THE SHAPE OF WHAT'S WAITING FOR US OUT THERE. OF WHAT'S LOOMING IN THE ETHER.

WE HAVE TO STOP IT, VICTOR.

CAN IT BE STOPPED? CAN *YOU* STOP IT?

CAN YOU SAVE ME? US? ALL OF US?

I BELIEVE I CAN...

BUT I REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE.

ME?

I'D LOVE TO HELP.

THEN YOU MUST CEASE THE PLAGUED THINKING THAT HAS INFECTED THE WORLD OUT THERE, MISTER REECE.

THINK LESS OF HOW IT ENDS...AND CONSIDER HOW IT ALL *BEGAN.*

NECROPOLIS.

THANOS IS NOT PLEASED, PROXIMA...

HE FINDS THAT VARIABLES CHAFE, AND THIS LATEST ONE--A MOST COARSE KERNEL OF ENLIGHTENMENT.

THANOS FINDS ALL OF LIVING AN IRRITANT, CORVUS...FORGIVE ME IF I DON'T LEAP BEFORE SO ORDERED.

THIS IS DIFFERENT. THIS... ***CHANGE*** AT THE INCURSION POINTS.

WE'VE KILLED, WHAT, DOZENS OF WORLDS BY NOW?

FOURTEEN, HUSBAND. FOURTEEN RIGHTEOUS AND GLORIOUS ANNIHILATIONS.

AND EACH TIME, AS SOON AS THE WORLD IS GONE, THE INCURSION POINT COLLAPSES.

BUT NOW, ACCORDING TO OUR MASTER, IT LINGERS--NOT LONG, BUT ENOUGH FOR THANOS TO CATALOG.

SO?

THAT PERIOD OF TIME IS EXPANDING. THANOS BELIEVES THAT--

HOLD.

WHAT...?

I THOUGHT... I WAS CERTAIN THAT...THERE WAS SOMEONE...

AND APPARENTLY I WAS WRONG.

JUMPY. LIKE A HURR IN WATER.

HRMPT.

SO... EXPANSION.

YES. THANOS SAYS THE CONCERN IS FOUND IN THE CONNECTIVE TISSUE--WHAT LINGERS SHOULD NOT EXIST--AND THEN HE BEGINS TO RAMBLE ON ABOUT BUBBLES OF OTHER...

"DESPAIR..."

DESPAIR LEADS TO DESPERATION--A LAND THAT NO MAN SHOULD LONG TO VISIT--BUT FOR *YOU*, STARK...

FOR YOU THERE IS WHERE HOPE CAN BE FOUND. BECAUSE YOU CAN STILL BE USEFUL. YOU CAN STILL HELP SHAPE THE VERY END OF THINGS. YOU CAN--

DAY AFTER DAY.

I'VE BEEN HERE FOR MONTHS NOW. SITTING IN THIS BOX, HOUR BLEEDING INTO HOUR.

THEY SAY THAT ISOLATION IS THE SUREST PATH TO MADNESS, BUT I'VE FOUND IT... ILLUMINATING.

I HAVE FOUND A CONSTANT THAT NEVER FAILS.

YOU.

EVERY DAY--DAY AFTER DAY--YOU SHOW UP. OFFERING ME A WAY OUT. OFFERING ME YOUR LATEST FLAVOR OF SALVATION.

I USED TO THINK IT HAD TO DO WITH ME BEING A GENERALLY USEFUL GUY--A BUILDER--BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK NOW?

WHAT?

I THINK YOU'RE IN LOVE.

DON'T BE OFFENDED--I THINK YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT FOR A VERY LONG TIME, AND NOW THAT WE'RE FINALLY GETTING DOWN TO IT...I JUST MIGHT BE YOUR LAST, BEST HOPE.

IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO THE SCIENCE OF ATTRACTION WITHIN CLEARLY DEFINED LIMITS. YOU'RE BOUND BY EVER-REDUCING OPTIONS AND PROXIMITY, KIDDO...

PLUS... LOOK AT THIS FACE.

I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT, ANTHONY. AS I HAVE TOLD YOU FROM THE VERY FIRST TIME I MET ANY OF YOU: THERE IS NO OUT.

THERE IS NO ESCAPING THIS.

I'LL CONCEDE, YOU PUT ON A GOOD SHOW...BUT THE PROBLEM IS I KNOW IT'S AN *ACT*. SEE, REED TOLD ME WHAT YOU'RE HIDING INSIDE OF YOU.

YOUR LITTLE SECRET.

"EXTENSIVE D.N.A. SAMPLES--FULL MEDICALS AND BRAIN SCANS, INCLUDING COGNITIVE MAPPING."

YOU'RE JUMPING FROM WORLD TO WORLD, LOOKING FOR A REFUGE SO YOU CAN REGROW YOUR LOVED ONES AND GET YOUR FAMILY BACK.

YOU'RE NOT A ***BLACK SWAN*** AT ALL...

YOU JUST PRESENT AS ONE.

AND WHO ARE YOU BUT WHAT THE WHEEL HAS MADE YOU?

A GOOD MAN? I THINK NOT.

LOOK AT WHAT YOU BECAME. LOOK AT THE THINGS YOU MADE.

LOOK AT WHERE YOU ***ARE***.

YOU FORGET... I WAS THERE THE ***LAST*** TIME YOU TRIED TO BE A HERO.

"WHEN YOU TRIED TO SAVE THE LIVES OF THOSE ALREADY LOST.

"I WATCHED YOU FALL."

AND THEN THEY PUT YOU HERE...IN THIS CAGE.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

...NOTHING YOU'RE SAYING MAKES WHAT I SAID UNTRUE.

I SUPPOSE NOT.

BUT I *WILL* FIND WHAT I AM SEARCHING FOR, STARK...AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS, YOU'LL STILL BE HERE...

ROTTING AWAY.

REGRETTING WHAT A FOOL YOU ARE, AND WHAT FOOLISH THINGS YOU SAID.

GOODBYE...

I WILL NOT BE RETURNING.

WELL, I'LL BE DAMNED...

JESSICA. NATASHA.

AREN'T THE TWO OF YOU A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES.

ALTHOUGH...

I SUPPOSE IT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE CAUSE FOR ***ALARM***. ARE YOU HERE ON BEHALF OF MY FRIENDS WHO WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME?

OR ON BEHALF OF MY FRIENDS WHO WANT TO ***KILL*** ME?

OH, ANTHONY...

IT'S AMAZING THAT YOU STILL THINK YOU HAVE FRIENDS AT ALL.

AND WE'RE HERE ON OUR OWN.

NO ONE ELSE KNOWS WHERE YOU ARE.

IF THAT'S THE CASE...THEN HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

STEVE. IT WAS LATE ONE NIGHT. WE WERE TALKING. NORMALLY... WELL, LATELY, ALL HE DOES IS PLAN. ALL HE DOES IS CHASE.

MOST PEOPLE HAVEN'T REALIZED-- THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR, THEY JUST SEE HOW STRONG HE IS-- BUT...ALL THIS...

IT'S TAKEN ITS TOLL.

WELL... WE'VE ***ALL*** SUFFERED, HAVEN'T WE?

HMMM.

HE MUST HAVE BEEN FEELING ESPECIALLY BROODING THAT NIGHT BECAUSE HE TOLD ME A STORY I HADN'T HEARD BEFORE.

OH?

YES. ABOUT HOW--AFTER YOU HAD YOUR... DISAGREEMENT WITH YOUR ILLUMINATI BROTHERS MONTHS AGO--YOU HAD CONTACTED HIM.

THAT THE TWO OF YOU MET IN SECRET. FOR A MEETING OF THE MINDS--FOR ONE LAST CHANCE TO BURY THE HATCHET.

DID HE TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

AND WHY I'VE GOT THE SAME HAUNTED LOOK ON MY FACE THAT HE HAS?

NO. HE SHUT DOWN.

BUT IT WAS ENOUGH FOR US TO FIGURE OUT ***WHEN*** THAT MEETING HAPPENED, AND THEREFORE ***WHERE***...

WHICH WAS JUST ENOUGH BREADCRUMBS TO TRACK YOUR LEAVING AND SUBSEQUENT MOVEMENTS--AND TO EXTRAPOLATE, AS WELL AS ONE COULD, WHERE YOU PROBABLY ENDED UP.

THANK GOD FOR SPIES WITH AN ITCH THEY CAN'T SCRATCH.

AND MORE IMPORTANTLY...THAT YOU'RE HERE TO SAVE ME.

WE'VE LEFT STEVE BECAUSE WE'RE DONE WITH HIS CAUSE--TOO RIGHTEOUS FOR THE TIMES...

BUT WE CAN'T SAVE YOU, TONY, UNLESS YOU KNOW THAT YOU NEED SAVING.

THIS IS A CAGE.

I'M PERFECTLY AWARE I NEED SAVING.

I WANT TO LET YOU OUT OF THERE...

BUT I CAN'T RISK UNLEASHING YOU BACK ON THE WORLD IF YOU CAN'T SEE THAT--IN YOUR OWN WAY--YOU'VE BEEN JUST AS WRONG AS HE HAS.

MAYBE EVEN WORSE.

WRONG?

WRONG?

YOU PEOPLE...

WRONG?

I HAVEN'T BEEN WRONG *ONCE!*

THERE'S NOT A SINGLE DECISION I'VE MADE THAT I WOULD CHANGE.

UNLEASH ME? *UNLEASH* ME?

YOU SHOULD THANK WHATEVER GOD YOU WORSHIP THAT I'M ALIVE TO SAVE YOU.

GREAT! WALK AWAY!

IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU'LL BE BACK.

BUT MAKE SURE WHEN YOU DO COME BACK--BECAUSE *YOU NEED ME*--THAT IT'S ON YOUR KNEES.

BOTH OF YOU! REPENTANT!

BECAUSE I CAN'T SAVE ANY OF YOU, UNLESS YOU REALIZE THAT YOU NEED SAVING!

AND THAT I'M THE ONLY ONE ON THIS ENTIRE PLANET WHO CAN DO IT!

NEW AVENGERS

ZONE